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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 05 NOUAKCHOTT 000191

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TAGS: PGOV PREL KDEM USAU LY MR
SUBJECT: FNDD READOUT ON QADHAFI'S MEDIATION

REF: A. NOUAKCHOTT 00189
1B. NOUAKCHOTT 00187
1C. NOUAKCHOTT 00188

Classified By: Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Dennis Hankins for reas
ons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: On the day of President Abdallahi's return from Libya and the eve of Qadhafi's visit to Mauritania, rotating FNDD President Abdel Koudouss Abeidna remains skeptical about the success of a Libyan mediation and believes only targeted sanctions will precipitate a solution to the crisis. President Abdallahi told Qadhafi he will not resign but is willing to discuss any other options. Nevertheless, Qadhafi, although aware that Abdallahi has more popular support than the Libyans originally thought, expressed it would be difficult to make the military step down and said the president had to be willing to give something up. Qadhafi was reportedly chided by the African Union's Ping for not sticking to AU policy on Mauritania. Abeidna also talked about the regional and international impact of the Israeli's expulsion from Mauritania and the regime's closeness to Iran. He wondered why the Europeans are not more concerned about the security implications of Iran's involvement in Mauritania. Finally, he stated that the FNDD plans to reach out to Uganda to accelerate Security Council sanctions. FNDD also plans to use Mauritania's alliance with Iran to ask members of the Arab League -- including Morocco -- to be more supportive of the AU. End summary.

THE PRESIDENT RETURNED TO LEMDEN UNPROTECTED

¶2. (C) Abdel Koudouss Abeidna, in a March 8 meeting with Charge and PolOff, confirmed that President Abdallahi returned from Libya that same day and had traveled directly from the airport to his native village of Lemden. Abeidna explained that the FNDD feels the president is safer in Lemden and advised him to remain there. As a result, President Abdallahi will not greet Qadhafi upon his arrival on March 9. Nevertheless, some FNDD members want to host a reception for the guide. Note: Charge told Abeidna he intends to attend Qadhafi's meet and greet at the airport if invited and any receptions hosted by Qadhafi. Nevertheless, he will decline any invitations to state dinners organized by

General Aziz in Qadhafi's honor. End note.

¶3. (C) In response to Charge's question on Libyan security arrangements for President Abdallahi's trip, Abeidna stated that the Libyans had offered someone to accompany the President to and from Libya. Nevertheless, the President and his entourage were surprised when they were put in separate planes from the Libyans, which made them somehow nervous. Abeidna also said that a military officer had facilitated the trip from Lemden to the airport but no expeditors had been provided for the President's return to Lemden.

ABDALLAHI SATISFIED WITH SHOW OF SUPPORT

¶4. (C) Abeidna repeatedly stressed the President's satisfaction with the populace's show of support at his arrival to Nouakchott from Lemden on March 6 (see ref A). According to Abeidna, the Libyans were impressed and realized for the first time that Abdallahi has a considerable number of supporters. Abeidna stated that the president's visit had changed the Libyan mind-set since they had been consistently told by the regime that Abdallahi was finished and had no real support.

ABDALLAHI'S MEETING WITH QADHAFI

NOUAKCHOTT 00000191 002 OF 005

¶5. (C) Abeidna said the President had found in Tripoli pretty much what they had expected -- which wasn't very much. Qadhafi was not sticking to the guidance laid down by the African Union and was in fact dismissive of democracy. The meeting may have had some impact on Qadhafi, and seemed to have had a significant impact on Qadhafi's diplomatic advisors who were impressed and surprised by the scale of support for Abdallahi. Abeidna, stressing that this was close hold within the inner circles of the FNDD, said, "If Qadhafi comes up with something useful, we are of course prepared to work with him. If he gives us more of the same, the President will play him along, but yield nothing, since breaking him will push him in with the military."

¶6. (C) Abeidna said that, in his meetings with Abdallahi, Qadhafi had generally stuck to listening to the president's position but had then gone off the AU script by suggesting that democracy was not an appropriate system for Mauritania and just a reflection of Western manipulation and stating that as the military were effectively in power it would be difficult to evict them, and that the president should be ready to give something up.

¶7. (C) President Abdallahi, according to Abeidna, told Qadhafi he will we was "prepared to do just about anything except resign since that act would "hand over the presidency and the country to Aziz on a silver platter." Other than that, he is open to any discussions. Throughout the meeting, Abeidna stressed President Abdallahi's refusal to resign and said that if they want to reach an agreement, Qadhafi will have to get rid of the military.

¶8. (C) Abeidna said the Libyans regurgitated General Aziz's plan to step down in order to run for office and transfer the country to the president of the senate. Their approach was very much "ni... ni..." (neither Aziz, nor Abdallahi). The president's response was that he did not need Qadhafi to follow that plan.

¶9. (C) Abeidna revealed Jean Ping arrived the second day of the meetings, supposedly following U.S. advice. AU Peace and Security Commissioner Ramtane Lamamra told Abeidna that Qadhafi had said he did not care about the international community and "would solve the Mauritanian problem his way." Ping said he told Qadhafi he should not think as a Libyan

leader anymore but as an AU leader. Abeidna said Ping was "going crazy" over Qadhafi's tenure as AU President.

DEMOCRACY'S TRIUMPH NOT IN QADHAFI'S INTEREST

¶10. (C) Abeidna claims that Qadhafi is both impressed by and afraid of the FNDD. An FNDD victory would change the mind-set of politicians in North Africa and could represent a threat to Qadhafi in his own country. He noted, "This is the first time he has seen North Africans really fighting for democracy -- even against European sentiment." Nevertheless, Abeidna expects Qadhafi's visit to Nouakchott to go smoothly but suspects that "Qadhafi will play tricks before leaving."

QADHAFI MAY NOT COME

¶11. (C) Abeidna suggested that Qadhafi may cancel his trip to Nouakchott if he does not reach an agreement with at least one of the parties. According to Abeidna, Qadhafi would not risk coming and having to leave empty handed. (Comment -- all indications his arrival is still on for the afternoon of the 9th.)

BRING ON THE SANCTIONS! (AND LET THEM EAT CAKE)

¶12. (C) Abeidna kept coming back to the subject of sanctions. He said Ping and Lamamra told him sanctions were

NOUAKCHOTT 00000191 003 OF 005

taking time as the AU was having problems with the Spanish. The Europeans believe that individual sanctions should bring increased humanitarian aid. According to Abeidna, this would not really be sanctions but more "like taking from one hand to put in the other." He stated that if the international community, and particularly the EU, distributes food, it will be giving General Aziz more time. Abeidna believes that the more there are shortages, the quicker the regime will fall. Charge stated that the U.S. did not want people to suffer and would not use humanitarian aid as a political instrument. Abeidna answered that the FNDD, even though accused by General Aziz of the contrary, did not want Mauritians to starve but stated that they don't want General Aziz to use international community food for his own benefit. "If aid goes through the UN that's fine," said Abeidna, as the FNDD "would not want General Aziz to say the U.S. has recognized him."

¶13. (C) For the FNDD, targeted sanctions are the only measure that would trigger a quick resolution to the crisis. According to Abeidna, the moment sanctions are declared "they will be like roaches looking for a hideout." He suggested sanctions against Mohamed Hmayenne Bouamatou, cement mogul Sahraoui Salek (NFI) and Mauritania's main sugar and flour importer Bahaye Ould Ghadda.

¶14. (C) Charge told Abeidna that sanctions against someone like Bouamatou would be relatively easy to adopt since his pro-coup actions were quite visible -- whereas it is harder to make the case against other financiers. The U.S. would need concrete evidence about the others' linkages to the regime. Abeidna stated he could ask the FNDD to provide evidence of their support to the coup, which they have financed directly and indirectly. Charge stated proof about alien smuggling and drug trafficking would be extremely useful. Abeidna said state evidence exists but it is in the government's hands and could only be retrieved if Abdallahi came back to power. Abeidna accused former President Haidallah and Colonel Ely Ould Mohamed Vall of involvement in drug trafficking. He said he feared that if these allegations were true, what happened in Guinea-Bissau could

happen in Mauritania.

THE JUNTA HAS MONEY

¶15. (C) According to Abeidna, the junta has the money to organize elections. He implied that they were behaving as if Qadhafi had given them a big check. He also said that Qadhafi probably paid to obtain the regime's permission to travel with weapons. Charge explained this was not unusual for the Libyans who always had unreasonable demands when traveling and ruffled feathers by the time they left. "I wonder how much longer the regime can go on, even if Qadhafi pays for the month's bills," Abeidna said.

ALIGNING WITH THE AXIS OF EVIL

¶16. (C) Abeidna explained that Morocco's decision to sever ties with Iran March 6 was a clear message to Mauritians that if they wanted to be part of the Axis of Evil, they would have to do so without Morocco's support. "Moroccans sent us the message that we are on our own." Mauritania's closeness to Iran puts them in opposition to Saudi Arabia and Egypt, countries that have traditionally supported Mauritania.

JUNTA IRKED BY ABEIDNA'S MOROCCO VISIT

¶17. (C) Abeidna's recent visit to Morocco had annoyed the HSC, who had accused Abeidna of "screwing up the junta's relations with Morocco." The HSC is particularly irked

NOUAKCHOTT 00000191 004 OF 005

because they have no idea what Abeidna did in Morocco and they think he went there to open a mediation with the Moroccans. These rumors were sparked by two articles in Moroccan newspapers. "If I was allowed to do that -- he means to meet with high-level government representatives -- that must mean Moroccans are not with them."

WHY ARE THE EUROPEANS BEHAVING THIS WAY?

¶18. (C) Abeidna expressed great frustration with the Europeans. In his view, the Spanish, Germans and French have shown "unconditional love" for General Aziz despite his mistakes, his government's unimpressive results and his alignment with Iran. In Abeidna's view, if the Europeans were so concerned about security they would be paying attention to Mauritania's newfound relationship with Iran. Abeidna said Iran could bring missiles to the country and pointed out the distance between Banc d'Arguin that he suggested "could target Miami." Abeidna also wondered whether the Europeans desired to have a Shia stronghold so close to home. "They are not weighing the risks," said Abeidna. Abeidna also intimated that Iran could reach out to AQIM to get rid of Westerners and that they would be able to provide serious funding for terrorist activities and to support an adversarial regime.

¶19. (C) Abeidna asked Charge to clarify the Spanish position. Charge responded that the Spanish had seen results in the fight against illegal immigration and were benefiting from that cooperation. They also valued Mauritanian fish and desired to curtail the drug trade so they favored security over democracy.

¶20. (C) Abeidna confessed his disappointment with the Europeans and particularly with the German Ambassador. "I told the German 'You keep blowing in our ear about the

importance of democracy, but when we strive to preserve it you turn your back.' " he said.

WORK ON UGANDA, THE EUROPEANS AND THE ARAB LEAGUE

¶21. (C) Abeidna, following advice from Ping, is convinced that Uganda, one of the African Security Council members, is key in accelerating UN Security Council sanctions. The FNDD has not reached out to Ugandans yet but plans to do so. Abeidna asked whether the U.S. could encourage the Ugandans to forward a Mauritania resolution in the Security Council or, perhaps, facilitate a video-conference between the FNDD and Ugandan officials as previously offered with Tanzania.

¶22. (C) Abeidna believes that China and Russia will accept a Security Council resolution calling for sanctions -- particularly if introduced by the Africans -- as they had expressed displeasure with the junta. As for Libya, he's convinced that they would themselves introduce a resolution if asked by the U.S. Charge expressed skepticism on that point.

¶23. (C) According to Abeidna, Ping has expressed disappointment at the Arab League for not supporting the AU. Now that Mauritania is getting closer to Iran, Abeidna thinks that FNDD could work on Morocco, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait to persuade them to be more supportive.

REACTIONS TO ISRAELI EXPULSION

¶24. (C) Abeidna asked Charge about European reactions to the Israeli Ambassador's departure (see ref B). He then stated the Spanish were mediating between the Israelis and the military. He related that the German Ambassador had previously told him, "If the Israelis are thrown out, Angela

NOUAKCHOTT 00000191 005 OF 005

Merkel will call me personally." Abeidna was clearly hopeful that the regime's decision to force the Israelis out would toughen the European stance against the regime -- both in support of Israel and because the decision suggests Mauritania falling into bed with the Iranians.

¶25. (C) Of the expulsion of the Israeli Ambassador, Abeidna said the regime "had sold it" to the Iranians and Libyans in exchange for support and hoped to use it against the FNDD. General Aziz thought that the people would go to the palace to congratulate him but that has not happened (Comment -- given the hoopla over Qadhafi's arrival, the populist boost Aziz might have expected over the Israeli departure has largely been lost). "Aziz has put us in big big trouble," stated Abeidna. He wondered why the regime would want to be cast as an Iran/Syria/Hamas supporter. "When confronted with dissension, they'd rather 'align with the devil' than seek a decent exit," he said.

COMMENT

¶26. (C) In the ups and downs of Mauritanian politics, Abeidna is more encouraged this week than he was last week. While doubting the utility of the Qadhafi initiative, the Tripoli trip offered Abdallahi the chance to demonstrate to Aziz and the outside world that there is some real public support behind him. The Israeli expulsion is seen as playing into the FNDD's favor by turning of some of the Europeans who are soft on the coup and casting the regime as tending towards the extremist branch of the Muslim world. The Qadhafi initiative forces everyone to play along, but it seems unlikely he will make any real headway.

HANKINS